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320 Calls Made To Executives, Affidavit Also Says

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BODY:

Federal agents say Sen. Ulysses Currie's undisclosed consulting relationship with a grocery store chain goes as far back as 2003, with 320 calls made from his phone lines to current and former executives of the company over more than four years.

The assertions are contained in an affidavit, made public by a federal judge yesterday, that was filed May 22 to justify a search of the Prince George's County Democrat's home by FBI agents.

After Currie's home in District Heights was raided May 29, documents and interviews have revealed that the senator repeatedly intervened in issues important to Lanham-based Shoppers Food and Pharmacy, prodding state and local agencies for traffic lights and sitting in on a local liquor board meeting in which a Shoppers store received a beer and wine license over community objections.

According to the affidavit, Currie's phone records showed there was "frequent contact" between his numbers and those of Shoppers representatives, the chief liquor inspector for Prince George's and an attorney for the county liquor board in 2005 and 2006, when the transfer of the liquor license from one Shoppers store to another was under consideration.

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"It is my belief that Currie used his official position and influence in connection with such legislation and in certain business transactions involving the state of Maryland in ways that benefited and would have benefited" Shoppers, FBI Special Agent Steven Quisenberry wrote in the affidavit.

Shoppers has confirmed that Currie worked as a consultant for the company. He did not reveal on state financial disclosure forms that he received income from the grocer, and the relationship is the subject of a federal investigation.

The affidavit was released by a federal judge at the request of Carl R. Metz, an attorney for The Washington Post and other news organizations.

Currie's attorney, Dale P. Kelberman, opposed the document's release. Afterward, he declined to comment.

A judge redacted a portion dealing with Currie's tax and banking records, which would reveal how much Currie was paid by Shoppers. U.S. District Judge Marvin J. Garbis indicated that portions of the information might become public, pending legal arguments.

The portions made public show there were frequent contacts between Currie's home, cell and district office lines and the numbers of Shoppers executives. Most, according to the filing, were made to employees involved in Shoppers real estate development and store construction.

More than 100 contacts were made in 2006 and 2007 between Currie's numbers and those of Shoppers executives. Some contacts occurred when the General Assembly was in session.

The filing also indicates that contacts took place in the period before the opening of a Shoppers store at Mondawmin Mall in Baltimore in November. The mall owners needed state land to expand, a renovation Shoppers had said was key to its decision to open a store at the site, according to the document.

Calls also occurred during that period between Currie's lines and those of the Maryland Transit Administration and state Transportation Department, which had jurisdiction over the land.

The filing also documents two legislative matters of interest to retailers such as Shoppers that Currie took part in without revealing a potential conflict of interest. In one, Currie voted on bills during two sessions that adjusted the percentage of sales tax collections that retailers could retain to cover administrative costs.

In the other, a bill that would have had the effect of raising retailers' taxes died in the powerful Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, which Currie led, during the special assembly session held from Oct. 29 to Nov. 19.

Forty calls were made from Currie's lines to phones of Shoppers executives from Oct. 1 to Nov. 19, and five more occurred Nov. 20.

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